

Towards
PROBLEM-ORIENTED
POLICE WORK

in the County of Stockholm



Lars Lieberg
Gunnar Thun

Towards problem-oriented police work in the County of Stockholm

Background

Most police researchers are agreed that a radical change in strategy is required if the police are to succeed in reversing rising crime rates. In a society where social control is increasingly weakening, the police can no longer just wait for crimes to be committed and then try to solve those crimes. Research shows that the police must adopt a problem-oriented attitude to their work.

We have deliberately chosen the term *attitude* to stress the fact that problem-oriented policing is not a method but rather an approach or a philosophy. Looking for patterns in a series of events and then trying to do something about the causes of these events is not new or revolutionary. This is something we all do in our everyday lives. If the rain leaks in through the roof, we do not normally limit our response to buying buckets; we try to mend the leak. Problem-oriented approaches have long been used in other sectors of society, for example by the medical service and fire departments. The police have so far, however, not been very active in developing such approaches in a conscious and purposeful way.

The first attempts to apply problem-oriented approaches systematically to police work were made about a decade ago, chiefly in the USA. The experience gained in the USA shows that it is very difficult to implement problem-oriented police work at all levels of a police organisation. The impact of information and training efforts at the grass-roots level has usually been weak and matters of a more urgent nature have taken precedence over the long-term problem-oriented work. Moreover, many officers who have been the prime movers in such schemes, have eventually given up due to a lack of support from their superiors. These observations, together with the experience gathered from previous schemes in our own country, served as a basis for the planning and implementation of problem-oriented police work in the County of Stockholm.

Earlier problem-oriented policing schemes in the County of Stockholm

Crime Prevention Unit

In 1975 a Crime Prevention Unit was set up at the Stockholm Police Authority. The primary duty of this unit was to spread information to the public, organisations and companies about how they could protect themselves from crime. Staff from the unit also participated in various fairs and exhibitions. Whilst this work generated a great deal of goodwill, the crime rate in the county continued to rise year after year. The community simply did not heed the crime prevention advice offered, nor did the police evaluate the result of their work, with the consequence that the preventive measures suggested by the police were implemented only to a very limited extent. The

lesson we learnt from this scheme was that *information campaigns that are not properly followed up do not contribute to a reduction in crime.*

Neighbourhood / Sector policing

During the 70s and the 80s, the Swedish police authorities created a small number of posts for neighbourhood / sector police officers (approx. 1-3% of the manpower) who tried to encourage community involvement in various crime prevention schemes. They contacted schools, shops and landlords in their respective areas with a view to persuading them to implement crime prevention measures and routines. This long-term work was, however, largely undermined by the fact that these officers were consistently assigned to other tasks of varying duration considered to be more important.

The neighbourhood / sector police officers had a very good reputation with the public and the politicians, but a fairly low status in the police service. This, together with poor career opportunities, resulted in most of these officers applying for other posts and gradually the neighbourhood / sector policing programme died out, despite attempts at resuscitation by the National Police Board and the Ministry of Justice.

The lesson to be learnt from this is that *police officers involved in long-term, proactive police work must not be used for other duties that someone considers to be more important, and that concrete action, rather than rhetoric, is required in order to raise the status of such officers.*

Akalla

In the mid-1980s a neighbourhood police officer, Erik Sundin, who had previously worked in Tensta (a high-crime Stockholm suburb), was assigned to the central Crime Prevention Unit where he introduced a new approach to crime prevention. Instead of trying to cater for the needs of the whole of Stockholm, the unit decided to focus their efforts on one particular area. The area chosen was an ordinary Stockholm suburb called Akalla. Some of the crimes that plagued residents in the area were selected for targeting: burglaries in dwellings, car thefts, theft from cars and burglaries in attic and basement storage rooms. Instead of just informing the public about crime prevention and hoping that positive results would ensue, the unit decided to approach various parties with a vested interest in solving the problems in the area, for example local housing associations, and try to make agreements with these parties that would ensure that preventive measures were taken.

A crime survey was made in partnership with people residing or working in the area. It turned out that caretakers for example knew more about basement and attic burglaries than the police; about 95% of such crimes went unreported due to the household insurance conditions that apply to burglaries in such premises.

Consultative groups were set up for each problem / crime category. One such group, in which the local social welfare authority was represented, was entrusted with the implementation of a referral scheme whereby drug addicts in the area were admitted

to institutions for aversion treatment. Another group with representatives of local housing associations was formed to ensure that physical changes were made in basements, attics and multi-storey car parks with a view to preventing burglaries etc. The meetings of these groups were chaired by a police officer who also kept a record of the discussions. In return, the police stationed a small unit in Akalla which performed uniformed foot patrols during the days and plainclothes surveillance patrols at night. While quite a few thieves were arrested by police officers on night patrol, the subsequent evaluation showed that the reduction achieved in 'everyday crime' was primarily attributable to the physical changes to premises and to the fact that the area had been rid of 'dope dens'. Some 50 children aged between 8 and 15, previously unknown to the police, were arrested for thefts from cars and storage rooms during school hours. Only a handful of these children re-offended. Auto crime dropped by 53% and burglaries in basements by 76%. No crime displacement was noticed, i.e. the crime rate did not increase in neighbouring areas.

The kind of police work described above was of a problem-oriented nature, although the term had not then been coined and defined. We were not aware at that time that police researchers and our colleagues in the USA had begun to work along the same lines.

A comprehensive report on the Akalla project was published and in view of the success of the scheme, one might have expected that it would soon be followed by similar schemes in Stockholm and elsewhere. However, it was some time before a new project of this kind was initiated.

Arlanda

Instead, Eric Sundin was assigned to a new project aimed at reducing the crime rate in another area. At Arlanda, Stockholm's international airport, the number of thefts from cars belonging to airline passengers was extremely high. A survey of the causes of the problem was made and discussions were initiated between the police and the National Board of Civil Aviation about what could be done to improve the situation. A number of quite costly technical installations were made, for example TV cameras and better lighting. In return, the Crime Prevention Unit, working closely with the Arlanda Airport Police, intensified its supervision of the parking lots during the project period. A subsequent study showed that the number of thefts from cars dropped by 56%.

Västerort

The experience and knowledge gained during the Akalla and Arlanda projects were processed and translated into action on a larger scale in the Västerort project which comprised an entire police district consisting of 46 residential areas and 176,000 residents. The emphasis on consultative groups was increased. One group, which consisted of representatives of homeowners in the district, was assigned the task of trying to prevent burglaries in private houses. Together with the police, an action plan of the kind used in British Neighbourhood Watch schemes, was drawn up. Moreover, six groups were set up with a view to improving the safety and security of people residing in blocks of flats and reducing the number of crimes in such buildings. These

groups were made up of police officers, caretakers and housing associations from six major residential areas. Another three groups, consisting of parents as well as representatives of the police, schools and youth centres, targeted juvenile delinquency. An umbrella organisation was also created in the form of a steering committee (chaired by the head of the police district) consisting of the heads of the Västerort municipal authorities and major local housing associations. The general policy decisions made by this committee paved the way for decisions by the consultative groups. Since the committee was made up of officials at the highest managerial level, empowered to make budgetary decisions, all matters concerning the funding of the project could be dealt with and decided by the committee.

This project, too, resulted in a drop in 'everyday crime' in the area: between 1990 and 1992 the number of such crimes fell by between 25 and 60%.

Another full-scale project, largely patterned on the one outlined above, was implemented in the police district of Farsta and similar crime reduction levels were achieved.

Conclusions

Throughout the three projects described above, the project manager, Eric Sundin, was stationed at the Crime Prevention Squad, instead of at a police district. Looking back, it is clear that this is one of the reasons why the projects were so successful. There is a definite risk that officers in charge of a project and responsible for providing support to project teams will be distracted by everyday administrative duties if they are attached to the unit that is implementing the project. Moreover, their freedom of action may be hampered by their dependence on the support of head of the unit.

The evaluations of the above projects showed clearly that consultative groups are very important in crime prevention projects. *It is essential that the members of such groups are empowered to make decisions and assigned responsibility for an entire crime / problem area.* The meetings of a consultative group should be chaired by a police officer who should also be responsible for keeping minutes of the proceedings, and the outcome of the meetings should be a joint action plan in which those responsible for a particular measure are identified. It is also important that the implementation of proposed measures is checked at regular intervals. *There is also a need for high-level co-operation in matters concerning the project budget and general policies.*

A new police organisation

Following a thorough study of the Stockholm police service, the County Administration decided in 1994 that the twelve police authorities in the County of Stockholm should be merged into one single authority, responsible for policing throughout the county.

The most important organisational decision was that the county should be divided into 60 community police districts, which in turn entailed the setting up of an 'all-round' local police service. The goal set by the County Administration was that there should

be one community police officer per 1000 inhabitants, that one-third of the county's manpower should be community police officers and that between 20 and 30 such officers should be stationed in each community police district.

Eight so-called Chief of Police Districts were created. In each of these districts there is a base station in charge of major crime investigations and responses to urgent requests for police assistance. Each Chief of Police District has a total manpower of between 200 and 1,100 officers and comprises 4 - 10 community police districts.

Special administrative and operational units were brought together under two central divisions, the Administrative Division and the Operational Division. Work towards developing the competence of crime investigators has been commenced.

Development Unit

The County Administration's decision was not limited to purely organisational matters, however. It was stressed most emphatically that **all** units in the Stockholm police service should adopt a problem-oriented approach to policing. In the study that preceded the decision, it was pointed out that it would be difficult to change time-honoured traditions and attitudes. To overcome this problem, it was suggested that a central consultative function, the Development Unit, be created that could provide support during the transition from traditional to problem-oriented police work. Erik Sundin (c.f. above) was appointed head of this unit, in view of his great experience in the direction of problem-oriented police work, and staff were hand-picked from other units. Since no officers with the right kind of competence for this kind of work were to be found in Sweden, a 6-month in-service training course was arranged for the ten police officers comprising the staff. One officer was assigned responsibility for the central Operational Division, while the other nine were assigned one Chief of Police District each (two officers in the City District).

Initially, it seemed a good idea to make a break with traditional police work simultaneously with a major organisational change. However, as the re-organisation process turned out to be lengthy and complex, a great deal of energy and interest were diverted from the work on implementing problem-oriented policing.

Information

An information and training programme was developed at the outset. The main objective stated for the information phase was to introduce the staff to the principles of problem-oriented policing and to provide encouragement and motivation for them to work according to these principles.

The information phase was initiated well before the new organisation was due to be implemented. All available information channels were used: the local police gazette, closed-circuit TV, video, pamphlets and posters. The staff were also given a total of 2 - 4 hours of information at meetings arranged by the Development Unit. The idea was to provide this information to all 6,500 employees in small groups, which entailed a large number of meetings. The reason we decided to limit the number of participants

at these meetings was to give every member of the staff an opportunity to ask questions. Many employees were worried about the changes that were to take place and wanted to know what would happen at their units and what their roles in the new organisation would be. The fact that the staff were so preoccupied with their own thoughts and worries made it difficult to get the message of problem-oriented police work across to them.

In retrospect, the oral information would have been more effective if the organisational problems had been fully resolved first and if people had known what their new duties would be. Thus, an two-step information campaign, with the first part focused on the structural changes and the second on problem-oriented policing, would have been preferable.

Training plan

The training plan was based on the experience gained in the course of previous problem-oriented projects. The most important piece of knowledge derived from these projects was that traditional training in the principles of problem-oriented police work alone would not help bring about any changes. During a long-term process of this kind, there has to be a consultant / support person at each unit who can function as a kind of pilot and correct the course of the development work as occasion requires.

The decision to implement problem-oriented policing applies to the entire police organisation. In view of the limited resources available, however, we decided to focus our initial training efforts on the community police service, partly because it is an entirely new organisation and partly because there is more room for long-term problem-oriented police work in this organisation, since the community police are responsible for responding to urgent calls for police service only to a limited extent.

All staff at the managerial level also took part in the first phase of the training since it is essential that such officials have a thorough understanding of the basics of problem-oriented policing.

Similar training will be also be provided in due course for the staff of units in charge of urgent responses and crime investigation.

The training was divided into three levels:

Level 1

The target group of Level 1 training consisted of the head of the Stockholm police authority, the County Chief of Police, the heads of the eight Chief of Police Districts and managerial staff working closely with these officials, staff union representatives, and the politically elected members of the Board of Directors of the police authority and the Chief of Police District Committees. The training lasted only one day since it was thought, rightly or wrongly, that high officials are too busy to attend long training courses. The training was given on several occasions to ensure that everyone involved would have the opportunity to attend.

During this course, the need was stressed for high-level co-operation with other agencies, organisations etc. with a view to paving the way for practical work at lower local levels, for example in the community police districts.

An additional one-day training course is being planned to ensure that the highest officials in the police authority have a thorough understanding of problem-oriented policing.

Level 2

Level 2 is focused on staff at the intermediate managerial level, superintendents acting as heads of squads or units and officers serving as commanding officers on duty. The training consists of a two-day course, the aim of which is to give the participants an understanding of problem-oriented police work and to provide them with the knowledge they need to implement this kind of work at their units. To this end, they must be able to perform surveys of problems in their fields of responsibility, to analyse the results of such surveys, to take action (in partnership with other agencies etc.) with a view to resolving the problems identified and to evaluate the results of the response.

An important goal of Level 2 training is that the participants on completion of the course should be able to explain the nature of problem-oriented police work to their staff and to provide them with the encouragement and motivation they need to adopt this approach to policing. At the time of writing, we do not know whether the goals of the Level 2 training course have been achieved, since it is given after the Levels 1 and 3 courses and is not yet completed.

Level 3

We realised early on that the most extensive training efforts had to be devoted to the new community police organisation. The most obvious target group was the 60 newly-appointed heads of the community police districts. In the community police organisation, all decisions are to be made by the head of the district, which means that he or she does not have any deputies. However, in view of the considerable administrative work-load of these officers, it was felt that they would not be able to cope with the task of both explaining the new approach to their staff and implementing problem-oriented policing in their districts. Accordingly, another four police officers from each district were admitted to the course. All in all, 300 community police officers, who were to function as a well-trained core in the districts, received Level 3 training.

The course extended over 12 weeks, so as to make it possible to sandwich theoretical and practical training. The theoretical part of the training comprised 12 days while the rest of the time was devoted to practical work involving problem surveys and analyses.

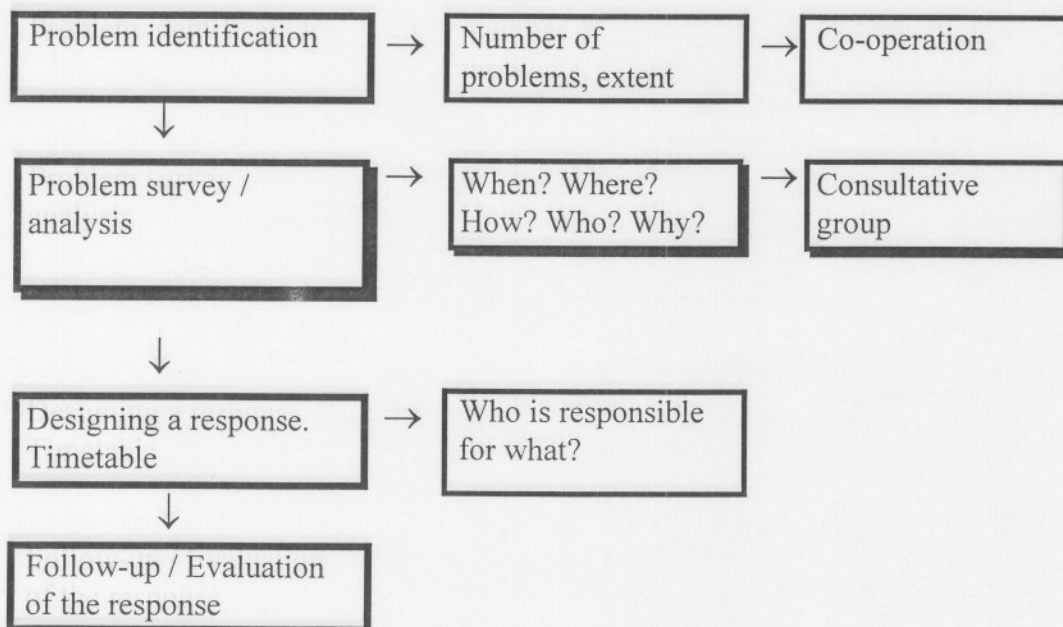
Some of the course modules were compulsory but the support persons in charge of the course had considerable leeway in the time-tabling of the various modules and in deciding the content of these modules. This gave them an opportunity to choose a content which would suit the needs of the community police in their own Chief of Police District. The compulsory part comprised 'The Four Building Blocks' and 'The Tool Box' (see below). The course was chiefly implemented by the participants themselves with the assistance of various lecturers.

The Four Building Blocks of community policing

The Four Building Blocks is the name chosen for the flow-chart shown below. The chart is basically that used in traditional problem-solving but has been modified to emphasise the need for co-operation.

Flow-chart

Problem-oriented police work



The Tool Box

One of the problems encountered was that there were no 'hands-on' teaching materials suitable for the training courses. The available literature on problem-oriented police work contained chiefly theoretical discussions and examples from the USA.

As a first step, we attempted to predict the crime categories and problems that might be identified in the course of problem surveys in the community police districts. The following categories were considered to be the most likely ones:

- Burglaries and disorder in blocks of flats

- Burglaries in houses
- Thefts from cars
- Boat thefts and thefts from boats
- Fear of crime
- Burglaries in shops and shoplifting
- Crimes relating to restaurants etc.
- Traffic accidents
- Habitual criminals
- Children at risk

Secondly, we gathered information from successful projects in which problem-oriented methods had been used to get to grips with these problem / crime categories. On the basis of this information we compiled a kind of manual in practical, problem-oriented police work, each section of which is based on the Four Building Blocks.

Problem survey

During the 12-week course, the participants were to perform a 'live' problem survey in their respective districts, which could serve as a basis for police work in the district during the next few years. Crime and other statistics were the chief source of information but residents and organisations in the districts were also polled with a view to gathering soft facts about fear of crime and unreported crimes.

Goals set by the Government

The primary goals set by the Government and Parliament for the police service are to reduce crime and increase citizen's safety.

When a number of problem / crime categories had been identified in a district, between two and six of these categories were selected for targeting, in accordance with the policy decisions of the police authority's Board of Directors and the Chief of Police District Committees.

Crime reduction / Safety goals

When a community police district has selected the crime or problem categories that it wishes to focus on, the district must define its goals so clearly that the result of its work towards achieving the goals can be evaluated. The following is an example of such goals:

- Reduce the number of thefts from cars in the western part of the district
- Increase the residents' safety in the shopping centre (drunkenness and drug offences).
- Reduce criminal damage (graffiti) along the underground line.
- Reduce the number of bicycle thefts at the railway station
- Reduce the number of burglaries in the eastern part of the district

The district now has a set of clear goals. Pending the provision of more manpower, a district may have to prioritise a few of the areas defined and defer action in others. Each officer, together with one or more of his/her colleagues, should be assigned responsibility for achieving one of the district's goals.

Eventually, the more specialised units will also be required to select a special area for targeting. For example, a crime investigation unit may choose to focus on domestic violence.

Survey / Analysis

Level 3 also included training in the analysis of prioritised crime/problem areas, partly on the basis of information derived from external sources. The analysis should be focused on when, where and how crimes are committed, who is involved and what the causes of the problems may be. Caretakers, newspaper-boys etc. may have information that will contribute to an understanding of the problems and may also be of assistance in the design of a response.

The evaluation of Level 3 showed that it was difficult to get the participants to seek information sources other than traditional police sources such as crime reports. Despite the fact that a fair amount of time had been set aside for the analysis stage, the work done by the participants was not as extensive and profound as we had hoped it would be.

Designing a response - consultative groups

In our model of community policing, all police officers in a district should be given responsibility for a particular crime / problem area and for achieving the goals set out for this area (for example 'Reduce criminal damage in the district'). When the analysis is completed, the next step is to enrol suitable co-operation partners in each area. Invitations to selected partners are currently being sent out and consultative groups will shortly be set up. These groups will draw up a timetable in which it should be clearly stated when the various measures undertaken by the parties are to be in place.

A major stumbling block, the negative implications of which we had underestimated, is that most police officers are not used to talking in front of a group, 'selling' ideas and chairing meetings. Initially, many of the consultative groups will need the assistance of a support person. The National Police College has also been asked to provide training in these matters.

Follow-up / Evaluation

The process should be evaluated on an ongoing basis on certain target dates. Have the measures agreed on been implemented? We know from experience that the police must monitor the parties in the consultative groups to ensure that they keep their part of the agreement. Did the measures result in improvements? If this question is

answered in the negative, it is important that the group is prepared to modify the response.

In this context, 'evaluation' means that the results are checked at a certain predetermined point in time. If the impact of the group's strategies on a particular problem is poor, the group must find out why. It is of course very important that the group uses the same sources of information when evaluating the results as were used at the problem analysis stage. There is also a risk that the group will apply too stringent scientific principles to its evaluation. It is important to remember that the evaluation is not performed for research purposes but to obtain feedback which will show whether the group has chosen a successful approach. The evaluation must not be an end in itself.

Evaluation of the training provided

The training given was evaluated by means of a questionnaire answered by the participants.

To ascertain whether the outcome of the training is the one intended (i.e. that the participants start working in a problem-oriented manner), the support persons assigned to the Chief of Police Districts monitor the work of the participants after the training course. In those cases where it is found that the work is not up to standard, the support persons can provide additional training at the workplace.

The first indication that the training provided has been successful is when the participants in their turn can teach newly-appointed community police officers the principles of problem-oriented policing.

A second, and very important, indication is when the participants succeed in setting up a *consultative group* whose members are empowered to make decisions, and are able to direct the work of the group towards a joint action programme for the crime / problem area chosen. An evaluation of this aspect of community policing is scheduled for implementation during the autumn and winter of 1995/1996.

A third indication is when the participants manage to translate their theoretical training into action by setting up *action plans*.

Action plans

The action plan is an important tool in the implementation of systematic problem-oriented police work. Each unit is to draw up its own action plan in which the goals of the unit are described. The plan should also contain information about the resources that have been set aside for each goal. The purpose of setting up such a plan is to separate the 'goal-oriented' work from the kind of work incumbent on the police under various acts and regulations (e.g. responses in cases where a person's life or property is at risk, crime investigations, lost property etc.) and to minimise the latter kind of work so that more time can be devoted to achieving the goals. It is laid down

in the general working plan of the Stockholm police authority that at least 50% of the working time should be devoted to achieving the crime reduction / safety goals.

Each unit should also indicate in the action plan how it intends to achieve its goals, bearing in mind the Four Building Blocks. For example, those measures the co-operation partners in the consultative group have agreed to implement should be stated, when these measures will be in place and when the results are to be evaluated.

Action plans should be adopted in all community police districts and units of the Chief of Police Districts and by the units of the central Administrative and Operational Divisions no later than 7 months after the beginning of the training course.

Summary

The most important conclusion drawn in the course of the process described above is that *information and training alone will not lead to problem-oriented police work.*

Additional measures are required:

- Clear implementation plans must be drawn up
- Organisational changes must be made which facilitate the transition from traditional to problem-oriented police work
- Officials at high managerial level must adhere to the principles of problem-oriented policing and ensure that these principles are applied by the staff
- A function must be created which can provide support and advice and which is fully backed by the management of the police authority
- The importance of patience and perseverance must be instilled in those involved in the work

Stockholm October 15, 1995

Lars Lieberg
Chief of Police

Gunnar Thun
Superintendent